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OUR POSSIBLE PRESIDENTS.

DAVID B. HILL.

AMONG the many eminent and worthy statesmen in the Democratic Party, whose names must appear in any trustworthy lists of "our possible presidents," there is no worthier, more capable, or more available name than that of David Bennett Hill, the present Governor of the State of New York, and there is little doubt, among political leaders who have taken the trouble to watch carefully the driftings of popular feeling and opinion, that the statesman who succeeded Grover Cleveland as Governor of the State of New York, will also be his successor as President of the United States.

Governor Hill, as President, will do equal honor to the party that shall elect him, and to the office to which he shall be elected. He fulfills every just demand that a democracy should make of the men whom it elects to high office in the Republic. He is able, an excellent judge of men, an incomparable public officer, a friend true and tried of the working classes, and that he possesses executive capacity in an eminent degree is admitted alike by partisans and opponents.

A brief review of his public life will justify this praise.

David B. Hill was born in August, 1843, at Havana, Schuyler County, New York. His father, Caleb Hill, was a carpenter who had come from New England and who has been described as "an industrious hard working man, ready to build anything from a canal-boat to a town-hall"—a man universally respected by his neighbors for his sterling qualities as a citizen.

David B. Hill, like Abraham Lincoln, was educated in the little cross-road schools of his district. He was noted as "a very studious and bright scholar, occupying his leisure hours in the study of the elementary principles of the law." After he had

advanced himself somewhat in these studies, he made arrangements to pass his hours out of school in the office of Mr. Mark Crawford, a village lawyer. In 1862 David went to Elmira, and entered the office of the then leading law firm of that part of the State, Messrs. Thurston & Hart. It shows that his early and undirected studies must have been quite extended that, after only two years spent with Thurston & Hart, hewas admitted to the bar and immediately was offered and accepted a partnership with the County Judge, G. L. Smith, who had been for some time observing, with a friendly interest, the young student's course. In the same year (1864), at the age of twenty-one years, Mr. Hill was elected Corporation Counsel of the City of Elmira, as the Democratic candidate. During the term for which he had been elected he began publicly to display those traits that he subsequently has so conspicuously exhibited in a larger field,—great executive ability, a painstaking diligence that mastered every detail of his business, a spirit of fairmindedness, and a rare promptness in seizing the strategic points of every situation. He gave entire satisfaction to the whole community for the able and impartial manner in which he discharged the duties of this his first public office. He had already become a popular political orator; and, indeed, at the early age of seventeen, had stumped his county in favor of Stephen A. Douglass as a Presidential candidate. He was especially popular as a speaker at workingmen's meetings, and gave his public adherence and zealous support to every measure calculated to ameliorate their condition and advance their true interests. It should be borne in mind that this was before the days of politically organized labor, and, therefore, was a proof of his sincere interests in their welfare, as no politician, at that time, had anything to gain by seeking their special favor. Those were the days of strict party allegiance.

In 1870, and again in 1871, Mr. Hill was elected to the State Assembly from the Chemung District. During those sessions he served on the Judiciary and Railroad Committees, although the youngest member of the house.

While a member of the Assembly he introduced, and passed through the lower house, a bill to abolish the system of contract prison labor. It failed to pass the Senate, owing chiefly to the objection and belief that the people would not approve it. Twelve years later the Legislature submitted the proposition embodied in

this bill to the popular vote, and it was adopted by a majority of 138,916; and, during the last session (1887), Mr. Hill, as Governor, had the gratification of signing a bill enacting the principle that he had tried to assert in legislation as a member of the Assembly. After his last session as legislator (in 1872) Mr. Hill was elected one of the managers of the impeachment of Judges Barnard and McCunn. Among the members of the Assembly of 1872 was the late Samuel J. Tilden, whose friendship he soon won—a cordial personal and political friendship, which lasted until the death of the Sage of Greystone. Mr. Tilden at once recognized the ability of Mr. Hill, and constantly sought and consulted and advised with him in political affairs. For a number of years Mr. Hill was a member of the Democratic State Committee. By his action on this committee he established a reputation with his associates as a prudent, wise, and judicious counsellor.

After Mr. Hill's retirement from the Legislature, he resumed the practice of the law, avoiding all political honors, but taking an active interest in the affairs of his county and his party. A well-known citizen, familar with the fact of Mr. Hill's career at this time, thus speaks of it: "As a lawyer, Mr. Hill was industrious, painstaking, and erudite; his briefs were models of legal lore and perspicuous statement; whenever he appeared he was always attentively listened to by jury, bar, and bench. It was quite a common occurrence for the judges to quote the language of Mr. Hill's brief with such complimentary phrases as 'so aptly expressed by counsel,' etc. His speeches to the jury were noted for one distinguishing characteristic,—he never 'spoke over their heads'; he addressed them in language so plain that they fully understood him, and followed his plea, from point to point, without losing a single link of it; speaking, too, always concisely and with force." This made him a very successful jury lawyer. As the public now know, the same traits have distinguished Governor Hill's state papers, which are all addressed to the average citizen, and, while irreproachable in style, are always plain, clear, and strong in presentation—qualities too rare in our public men and their documents. Mr. Hill as a lawyer constantly accepted cases for workingmen, when convinced that they had been wronged, without demanding retainers; thus, before the days of trade unions, practically and professionally demonstrating that his sympathies were with the laboring men.

His popularity at home was attested by the fact that whenever it was known that he was to speak in court the court room was always crowded by the people.

In 1882 Mr. Hill was elected Mayor of the city of Elmira; and in the fall of the same year he was elected Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York, receiving the largest majority ever received by a candidate for any State office.

As Lieutenant Governor, he was presiding officer of the State Senate, and in that capacity displayed rare parliamentary ability and knowledge. The impartiality of his actions and the justice of his rulings were conceded by both parties.

The election of Governor Cleveland to the Presidency in 1884 transferred Mr. Hill to the Executive Mansion, as Governor of the State.

There are three traits by which the success or failure of a chief executive, under our system of government, can be fairly tested, —his appointments to office, his recommendations to the legislative branch, and his exercises of the veto power.

By each of these tests Governor Hill deserves to have his name enrolled in the list of our most successful and practical statesmen.

His opportunities for making appointments have not been numerous, but it is of uneffacable record that he has never nominated or appointed any person to office who was not both capable and trustworthy.

In considering Governor Hill's recommendations to the Legislature, it should be remembered that, with his characteristic desire to attempt the attainable only, he has consistently refrained from suggesting such measures as he knew would be rejected by the politically hostile body to which they would have to be addressed —for the Legislature has never been in political accord with Governor Hill, but always politically antagonistic to his party.

In his first message Governor Hill recommended a vigorous prosecution of the policy of restoring and renewing the structures of the Erie Canal and its banks in order to promote the general interests of business. It is hardly necessary to point out that this policy was also the only practicable way, at that time, of checking, in some measure, the arbitrary power of the railroad monopolies of which there was so much and such just complaint.

Having always taken a great interest and pride in the National

Guard, Governor Hill recommended the purchase of the grounds near Peekskill for the purposes of a State camp of instruction. Under Governor Hill's fostering care, New York has now a system of citizen soldiery which is not surpassed in efficiency and equipment by any State in the Union—a result largely due to his personal interest and efforts.

He recommended such amendments of the laws relating to the ballot as should remove all irritating and unwise technical obstructions against its free exercise by our adopted citizens. "The path to the ballot-box," he wrote, "should be as free to the adopted citizen as to the native born."

He recommended that practical measures should be adopted for the protection of the Adirondack and other forests in order to insure the preservation of our State water-courses.

He referred, at considerable length, to the constitutional provision guaranteeing absolute freedom of worship, and gave notice that any act having for its purpose the enforcement of the inviolable right of religious liberty and freedom of worship would have his prompt executive approval.

Governor Hill has repeatedly recommended the appointment of a special counsel for the Legislature, whose duties shall be to prepare, in legal form, all bills to be introduced by any member; to inspect the bills before their final passage in order to detect technical errors, imperfections, and mistakes; to suggest and frame the necessary amendments, and generally to act as legal adviser of the Legislature as to matters of form.

Every person who has had practical experience in legislation knows that by want of technical knowledge in the framing of bills our laws are needlessly obscure, contradictory, and otherwise imperfect, thereby often occasioning expensive litigation—a clear loss to the community; and that, also, as the Governor pointed out, "much valuable legislation is lost every year by reason of defective bills, hastily drawn and crudely prepared, which might have been saved with the aid and assistance of such counsel."

This statesmanlike suggestion is the first practical remedy ever proposed for evils in legislation everywhere acknowledged, and everywhere resulting in waste and confusion, and sometimes in corruption. As an illustration of the wisdom of this suggestion, the writer may state that last winter he was shown a bill to amend a law that had been repealed two years ago.

He recommended to the fostering care of the Legislature, the New York Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva, with the most cordial indorsement founded on a personal investigation of its management.

He recommended the adoption of "some less barbarous method of execution than hanging, which has come down to us from the dark ages;" that some method more in accord with the advanced science of the day should be adopted in the execution of criminals.

After showing that *all* the penal statutes providing that certain acts are misdemeanors ought to be embraced within the penal code, and that there are many laws upon special subjects providing that their violation shall be a misdemeanor, which are *not* included in that code,—a code, he argued, that ought to be complete within itself, and embrace every crime recognized by law,—he recommended that, when the code should be thus perfected, the people should be made familiar with its contents, and, to this end, suggested that "a copy of such code should be placed at public expense in every school library in the State, so that the people might know, and the children might be taught, what acts are criminal in the eyes of the law."

He recommended such legislation respecting railroads as should insure to the traveling and business public the lowest rates of transportation compatible with the protection of the rights of honest investors in that kind of property, thus insuring exact and equal justice to all parties.

After illustrating the injustice and imperfections of our present system of taxation, and showing that personalty does not pay its fair share of the State burdens, he recommended such changes in the laws as should insure equality of taxation on all property, whether it should be in realty or personalty.

He recommended that the State and municipal elections should be held at different times.

Every practical politician knows that this measure, to quote the Governor's language, "would relieve the choice of local officers from the influence of partisan politics." But it would do more. It would remove one of the most prolific sources of political corruption—"trades" and "deals," made without reference to the fitness of the individual or the welfare of the State.

He recommended the separation of the Bureau of Elections

from the Police Department in the city of New York, and the creation of a separate, independent bureau of a non-partisan character, having no connection with and deriving none of its powers or authority from that department, and requiring that its members and employés shall not be officers or members of the general committee of any political organization, or hold any other office, and conferring the appointment upon such authority and in such a manner as to insure the service of independent citizens of the highest standing and character in the community.

He recommended home rule for New York City, and he has always opposed the policy of governing distant communities from Albany instead of by their local governments. He has always favored and urged the enactment of such general laws as should establish definitely municipal home rule throughout the State.

He recommended the passage of a joint resolution asking Congress to take immediate action on the subject of coast defenses, in which this State is more interested than any other of her sisters.

He recommended the creation of a Gas Commission to exercise over gas companies an authority similar to that held by the Insurance Department and by the Railroad Commission of the State, this new commission to be supported by special taxes to be levied on the gas corporations.

He recommended, as a measure of protection to the people against adulterations of food and medicines, that the scattered laws on the subject should be corrected, where needed, and then incorporated into one general statute.

He recommended a reorganization of certain executive departments, so as to insure greater simplicity and less expense in carrying on the business of the State.

He recommended, in 1885, that criminals in capital cases in the Court of Oyer and Terminer should be enabled to appeal directly to the Court of Appeals without expense to them; thus enabling the poor to have the advantages which the rich only, under the existing system, could secure. In 1887 he had the pleasure of signing a bill embodying this recommendation.

In his second message Governor Hill made a recommendation of the greatest importance on the limitation of the power of corporations to issue stocks and bonds. He showed that, under existing laws, with few exceptions, there is no limit to the amount

of bonds which corporations may issue or upon the price at which they may be sold, and that, thereby, the interests of shareholders and bondholders are often rendered of little value by issues of bonds exceeding the value of the property of the corporation ; and that, therefore, if dividends are paid upon these over issues, rates must be charged to pay like dividends upon the capital actually and honestly invested. Shares so issued and bought by investors are frequently found not to represent values—to be practically worthless. This prevailing policy therefore robs the honest investor by depreciating his property, while it unjustly taxes the general public by levying excessive charges to pay dividends on so-called "values" which in reality do not exist. The Governor accordingly recommended the enactment of a law prohibiting the issue of shares of stocks except on receipt by the corporation of their par value in cash, and prohibiting the issuing of bonds in excess of the amount of the capital of the corporation paid in cash.

"No attempt should be made," he suggested, "to affect vested interests, or stocks, or bonds already issued, but the statute should be applicable to future issues only."

This recommendation, if it had been adopted, would have removed, I am satisfied, the chief just cause of discontent now so widely felt by the working classes.

A bill embodying this recommendation was introduced into the last Legislature by the Democrats, but it was defeated by the Republican majority. I sincerely hope, however, that this effort will not end here, but that the next State and National Democratic Conventions will incorporate a policy in harmony with this wise and vitally important recommendation.

This recommendation, when generally acted on, will frustrate the present alarming tendency to supplement the power of corporations, already too great for the public good, by the creation of union trusts,—vast combinations of capital irresponsible to the law or the people, and which threaten to become more powerful than the Government itself.

There is nothing more certain than that, hereafter, no man will ever be elected President of the United States who has not made a long and consistent record showing that his sympathies are with the laboring and agricultural classes—the real producers of the national wealth. No conspicuous public man has a more desirable record on this point than Hon. David B. Hill. Himself the son

of a mechanic, his lot has been cast among the people, and he has grown up with a thorough knowledge of and sympathy with their needs, their hopes, and their aims. He has always kept in touch with the people, both as a private citizen and a public officer. Without violating the unwritten law which holds the private life of public men sacred from intrusion, I do not feel that perfect justice can be done to Governor Hill without referring to the unpretentious simplicity, the entire absence of all ostentation, that distinguishes his mode of living. Easy of approach and always respectful, courteous, and considerate to the sovereign people, whom he has been honored to serve, no citizen, however humble, is denied an audience with his Chief Executive when any real or supposed interest impels him to seek an interview with the Governor.

His recommendations on industrial questions have shown a profound interest in them and a most intelligent comprehension of the requirements of the day.

In his first message he gave a conspicuous passage to a statement of the interests of labor, in which, after referring to the unprecedented increase of the wealth of the country, he said that the great importance of the labor question was shown by the fact that, notwithstanding the great increase of wealth, the further fact that there are now thousands of laboring people who are able and willing to work standing idle, while they and their families are denied the comforts and many of the necessaries of life, makes it evident that labor does not receive its fair proportion of the rewards which industry and honesty entitle it to share, and that mismanagement exists which should be inquired into and remedied.

He recommended that the importation of pauper contract labor should be prevented, and that some system for the settlement of controversies between employers and employed other and better than the remedy by strikes should be devised; and that, as, under existing laws "facilities have been afforded to enable capital to incorporate and combine for its protection, like facilities should be afforded for the organization of labor." These recommendations were of course ignored by the Republican majority, but were again brought to the attention of the Legislature in his message of the following year. On these reiterated recommendations the present State Board of Arbitration was established. In urging these measures Governor Hill announced a principle

that had guided his entire public career, when he wrote "the Legislature should generously favor whatever conserves the welfare of the toiling masses."

In the same message Governor Hill recommended that an act be passed abolishing labor by children under fourteen years of age, especially in factories and similar workshops, and properly regulating the employment of all minors. In accordance with this recommendation, a general law was subsequently passed.

In the interest of the laboring classes, Governor Hill also recommended the "Tenement-House Bill" of the last session of the Legislature, imposing penalties on the owners of tenement houses for criminal neglect in providing such sanitary requirements as are essential for the preservation of the health of the tenants, which, after much opposition, became a law; such an amendment of the laws for the collection of debts as would enable laborers to collect their wages more easily and with less expense, which also became a law; a law limiting the hours of labor in certain cases, and the law establishing a legal annual holiday on the first Monday of September, commonly known as Labor Day, and the recognition of every Saturday afternoon as a legal half-holiday, of which he was the sole originator.

In advocating these measures, he gave expression to these statesmanlike views:

"It is the true policy of the State to elevate and dignify labor, not by exacting the greatest amount of toil that the laboring classes are capable of furnishing, but by legitimately encouraging every honest effort to improve their condition and requiring that only reasonable hours of labor shall constitute a day's work, for which full and adequate compensation should be received. The dignity of labor can best be preserved by insisting that labor shall be better compensated. Increased compensation will furnish greater facilities for education, more comfortable homes, more contented families, and better opportunities for recreation, as well as tend to develop nobler aims and purposes on the part of working men, greater interest in the peace and prosperity of the State, and higher ideas of citizenship."

I have not space to review other of his sagacious and thoughtful recommendations, but enough have been cited to give an accurate idea of the ability, the policy, and the principles of the man.

If all of these wise recommendations have not been embodied in legislation the fault does not rest with Governor Hill.

I cannot now and here review the vetoes of Governor Hill, but it will suffice to say that they exhibit the same spirit, expressed in the same clear and terse style that characterized his professional briefs and arguments. Perhaps his most notable recent veto was that of the "Crosby High License Bill," so called, which he condemned because it was a questionable measure of discriminative taxation providing for unlimited license for two localities instead of a fixed reasonably high license applicable to the whole State, and consequently was special legislation, to which Governor Hill is inflexibly opposed. In this veto message he showed that, in the interior of the State (which had been exempted from the operations of this bill), the percentage of saloons to population was from four to five times greater than that of the two cities to which it was proposed to apply it, thus exposing its injustice and inconsistency.

Governor Hill has never signed any bill without first making a very careful study of it, and, therefore, although his vetoes have been quite numerous and have been sent to a hostile body, not one of them has been overruled by the Legislature. One cause of this success has been his willingness to hear the advocates and opponents of all bills before taking final action.

As to Governor Hill's availability as a candidate there can be no doubt.

The NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW is not a political A B C class, and therefore I need not waste time here in demonstrating that to carry New York is essential to the success of any party at the next Presidential election. Now, beyond question, Governor Hill is the most popular Democrat in this State. Whenever he has run for any office he has been triumphantly elected, and whenever he has been a candidate with others he has run ahead of the ticket. Governor Hill has greatly strengthened his hold on the people by his course as Governor. He is bold without that hardihood which faces dangers and difficulties with a reckless inappreciation of their import. He always fully understands what is before his party or himself as one of its representatives, and performs whatever duty may befall him with the firm unshrinking spirit of the truly brave man who, "knowing danger, does not fear to meet it;" and few men in executive office have been

more persistently assailed by an opposition majority. He does not belong to the new school of Mugwumpish politics, which sneers at party allegiance and seeks its reward in the praises of enemies rather than in the continued support of the party that elected him. Governor Hill has been grateful and loyal to his friends ; he has cemented, not distracted, his party. His influence has been used to keep it abreast of the best thought and purposes of the times and in harmony with its own best traditions, not to breed discord by affecting to be superior to it, and to be under no binding obligations to it.

He has impressed his ability and individuality upon his party to such a remarkable degree as to have inspired it with a feeling of confidence and reliance unprecedented.

It has become a settled feeling among his colleagues, as well as his fellow citizens, that, whoever else may be doubtful, Governor Hill can be depended upon as a matter of course. One of the most common expressions in his party, when its representatives are undecided, or wish to avoid the responsibility of acting or deciding upon a measure of policy—Oh, well, leave that to Governor Hill. To such an extent has the feeling of trust in Governor Hill grown with all factions of the Democratic Party, that he is not only considered as a "possible President," but as an inevitable President.

In a word, Governor Hill is an ideal Democrat, who has been weighed in the balances of power and not found wanting.